

NEW YEAR 2026 Text: John 15:1-8 / Galatians 5:16–26

Small Changes for a Stronger Faith

1. ILLUS: From 1908 – 2003 British Cyclists never won the Tour de France and had only 1 gold medal in the olympics... in almost 100 years!¹

- a. Their performance was so poor that a top bicycle manufacture refused to sell to them!
- b. But in 2003 they hired a new performance director, Dave Brailsford, Who was a fan of “process improvement techniques which he called the “aggregation of marginal gains”.
- c. **Marginal improvements, even just 1%, in all areas, ADD UP to Big Improvements.**
 - So They Made Changes in All Areas to Make Small Improvements...
 - Redesigned the seats for better comfort, Rubbed alcohol on the tires for better grip,
 - they used electric warmers to keep ideal muscle temperatures,
 - tested riding suits in wind tunnels, used lighter weight gear,
 - hired a surgeon to teach hand washing techniques to reduce viruses and colds.
 - Food & Nutrition was analyzed. Sleep techniques to promote better rest and recovery.
- d. **Over 100 small changes in many different areas — So What was the Result?**
 - In the 2004 Olympics they won two medals, best since 1908
 - In 2008 they Dominated the Olympics, 8 Gold medals
 - 2012 Olympics: 8 Gold Medals, 9 Olympic Records and 7 World Records
 - That year they won the Tour de France for the first time
 - And Won the Tour de France again from 2015, 2016, 2017.
 - From 2007 to 2017 they won 178 world championships in road, track, BMX & mountain bike. 66 Olympic Gold Medals and 5 Tour de France victories.
 - That 10 run is regarded as the most successful in cycling history

2. Personal Growth in Spiritual Maturity is a theme of the NT (1 Cor. 9:24-27)

- Greek word (auxano) translated: to grow, increase, become greater (found 22x in NT)
- Greek word (prokopto) translated: to drive forward, advance, make progress (6x in NT)
- Greek word (pleonazo) to do, to be more, to abound, abounding, increasing (9x in NT)
- Greek word (perisseuo) to be better, to excel (39x in NT)

I. THE KEY TO SPIRITUAL GROWTH (John 15:1-8)

(1) WHAT IS THE KEY TO SPIRITUAL GROWTH?

- 1. Notice what Jesus says: (John 15:1-4)**
- 2. The Key is Abiding in Christ— (John 15:5–8)**

In Christ we are a new creation, old things have passed away and all things become new

3. Apart from Christ we can do nothing...

- a) So this is more than just willpower... This is God helping us to change!
- b) With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible (Matthew 19:26)

¹ British cycling story from a handout from Waupaca, church of Christ, 215 W Badger St. Waupaca. WI

(2) SO WHAT IS THE FRUIT THAT JESUS WANTS US TO PRODUCE?

1. **The Fruit of the Spirit is the natural spiritual growth of Abiding in Christ**
2. **A TREE IS KNOWN BY IT'S FRUIT (Luke 6:43-45)**
3. **But a Tree Doesn't Grow Overnight... It Makes Small Progress everyday**

The Key to Spiritual Growth is Abiding in Christ... The Result is the Fruit of the Spirit

II. THE AREAS FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH (Gal. 5:22-23)

(1) LOVE (agape)

1. **AGAPE: This is the highest form of love...**
 - a) not based on feelings or an emotion. It is a self-sacrificing love of self-giving service.
2. **(John 13:34–35) Love is not an option—it is a Command**
 - a) Love was not a new commandment: They were to Love God and their Neighbor
 - b) What was NEW is the Scale and Scope: “As I have loved you.”
 - c) This is how the world will know you are a Christian—by your love for one another!
3. **(1 John 3:14; 4:7–8) → Is Love being produced in your life?**

(2) JOY (chara)

1. **This is not a feeling or emotion from favorable circumstances...**
 - This joy can actually increase when circumstances are at their worst.
2. **It is an inner spiritual joy that no one can take away.**
 - a) Greek: chara (joy) is related to the greek word (charis) Grace
3. **It is the Joy of Salvation... the joy of being right with God**
 - The joy of abiding in the love of God: **(John 15:9–11)**
 - a) (Nehemiah 8:10) "The joy of the Lord is your strength"

(3) PEACE (Greek: eirene / Hebrew: shalom)

1. **A Peace NOT based on circumstances—it is the peace of God (Phil 4:6-7)**
 - a) Even with all the chaos in this world, the political conspiracies, the Military conflicts,
 - b) all the family dysfunctions, Physical illnesses and financial disasters
2. **God is on His throne—and there is nothing that can happen on this earth that can ever change that.**
 - a) Described as: “The smile of God reflected in the soul of the believer, the heart's calm after Calvary's storm, the conviction that God who spared not his own Son will surely also, along with him, freely give us all things (Romans 8:32).” (Hendricksen)
3. **When you find your peace and calm in God—**
 - a) Then you can let go of the anxiety that makes you try to control everything
 - b) Peace with God allows you to finally have peace within yourself... then w/ others
 - c) It doesn't come from trying to control things that are out of your control
 - It is from God **(John 14:27; 16:33)** →Is Peace being produced in your life?

(4) PATIENCE (makrothumia, long-suffering)

- 1. Peace with God allows us to have patience with ourselves and others**
- 2. John Chrysostom said this is the grace of those who could revenge themselves and do not, because they are slow to anger.**
 - a) I think of **Joseph**—when the tables were turned and Joseph had the power to take revenge on his brothers—he chose to forgive instead.
 - b) Joseph said: You meant it for evil but God used it for good (Genesis 50:18–21 ESV)
- 3. God is slow to anger—and expects His children to be the same. (Ps 86:15)**
 - a) God is long-suffering, not willing that any perish but that all would repent (2 Pet 3:9)

(5) KINDNESS

- 1. Love is patient and love is kind (1 Corinthians 13:4–5 NIV)**
- 2. Jesus is our example... When the little children were brought to Jesus,**
 - a) His disciples rebuked them... “But Jesus said, “Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven.” (Mt 19:14)
- 3. And for us Jesus said: Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. (Mt 11:28-29)**

(6) GOODNESS (agathos)

- 1. This has to do with moral and spiritual excellence this is known by it's sweetness and active kindness**
 - a) EX: When Joseph was betrothed to Mary but found out she was pregnant...
 - b) He had not yet been told this was a miracle from the Holy Spirit...
 - c) he did not want to expose her to public shame (Matthew 1:19 NKJ; ESV)
- 2. David relied on the goodness of God (Psalm 27:13)**
- 3. We are to share this with others (Galatians 6:10)**

(7) FAITHFULNESS (pistis)

- 1. Faithfulness has to do with our loyalty and trustworthiness**
- 2. God is faithful (Lam. 3:22)**
- 3. Jesus was faithful unto death (Phil 2:7-9)**
- 4. Jesus calls us to be faithful unto death (Rev. 2:10)**

(8) GENTLENESS (praotes)

- 1. This is a humble, gentle attitude that is patient with others**
 - a) Even when wronged by others.
 - b) But without any desire for revenge or retribution.
- 2. In the NT this word describes 3 attitudes:**
 - a) A Submissive attitude towards the will of God (Col 3:12-13)
 - b) A Teachable spirit, not too proud to learn (James 1:21)
 - c) Being considerate of others (Eph 4:2)
- 3. We are called to be kind (2 Timothy 2:24)**

(9) SELF CONTROL (egkrateia)

1. This pertains to the discipline of self-mastery (1 Cor 9:25)
 2. Having control over your own spirit (Proverbs 25:28; 16:32)
 3. Seneca said, “no man is free who is a slave to his own flesh”
 4. Leo Tolstoy said: “everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself.”
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III. SMALL CHANGES FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

(1) WHAT SMALL CHANGES CAN YOU MAKE FOR A STRONGER FAITH?

1. More Time in Prayer... this is a small change that has big benefits!
2. More time spent reading God’s word... daily Bible reading. Or listening to an audio Bible. Faith comes by hearing and hear the word of God.
3. Bible Study... meditating on the word of God each morning
4. Praising God, rejoicing, giving thanks to God, counting your blessings.
5. Assembling with the Saints—
6. Attending every Sunday for worship with the saints
7. Attending Sunday morning Bible studies... Wednesday night Bible Studies
8. We will be starting a Thursday afternoon Bible study in a few weeks
9. Visiting the saints, calling and checking up on on another
10. Visiting the sick or those in the hospital
11. Helping those who are in need.
12. Praying with one another
13. Hospitality... inviting someone into your home
14. Encouraging one another / Helping one another / Serving one another
15. There are many small things we can do (Matthew 25:34–40)

CONCLUSION:

1. What small changes can you make for a stronger faith?
2. Paul said: ‘I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me’
3. Jesus said (John 15:4–5)
4. With man this is impossible—but with God all things are possible